

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CRITICAL HABITAT DESIGNATED FOR BRAUN'S ROCK-CRESS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today designated approximately 1,600 acres in 22 upland areas of Kentucky and Tennessee as critical habitat for the endangered Braun's rock-cress. A perennial herb of the mustard family, Braun's rock-cress was listed under the Endangered Species Act on Jan. 3, 1995.

Of the 22 areas designated as critical habitat for this species, 14 are in Franklin County, Kentucky, and three are in Owen County, Kentucky. In Tennessee, the Service is designating four critical habitat areas in Rutherford County and one in Wilson County. Each of the designated areas supports an existing population of Braun's rock-cress. The Service is not designating any unoccupied areas as critical habitat.

The Service proposed designating 1,008 acres of critical habitat for Braun's rock-cress on June 3, 2003. The initial proposal was revised to include newly discovered areas in Tennessee that had not been analyzed in the original proposal. The Service considered all public and peer review comments received during the comment periods, as well as the economic analysis.

An economic analysis conducted for this action concluded that the designation may result in a cost (in present value terms) of approximately \$47,000 to \$209,000 in potential economic impact. High-end cost estimates were used to determine these figures, and they included all costs attributed to the listing of this species. Other than the high-end, conservative estimates, our economic analysis indicates an overall small economic impact will result from this designation.

Braun's rock-cress has round stems and alternate leaves. The stems and foliage have a grayish coloration due to the large quantity of hairs. The stems arise from horizontal bases and grow up to 31.5 inches long, often drooping from rock ledges. Each year a basal rosette of leaves is produced, and new flowering branches emerge from the old rosette of the previous season. The flowers are arranged singly on an elongated, unbranched stem. Each flower has four white to lavender petals and four pale green sepals. The plant blooms from late March to early May. Plants live up to five years.

Critical habitat is a term in the Endangered Species Act. It identifies geographic areas that contain features essential for the conservation of a threatened or endangered species and may require special management considerations. These include areas that provide sufficient space for individual and population growth and features that accommodate normal behavior traits, and provide cover or shelter; food, water, air, light, minerals, or other nutritional or physiological requirements. Also considered are sites for seed dispersal and germination that are protected from disturbances or are representative of the historic geographical and ecological distributions of a species.

The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve, or other conservation area. It does not allow government or public access to private lands. This critical habitat designation was completed in response to a lawsuit filed by the Southern Appalachian Biodiversity Project.

In 30 years of implementing the Endangered Species Act, the Service has found that the designation of critical habitat provides little additional protection to most listed species, while preventing the Service from using scarce conservation resources for activities with greater conservation benefits.

In almost all cases, recovery of listed species will come through voluntary cooperative partnerships, not regulatory measures such as critical habitat. Habitat is also protected through cooperative measures under the Endangered Species Act including Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements and state programs. In addition, voluntary partnership programs such as the Service's Private Stewardship Grants and Partners for Fish and Wildlife program also restore habitat. Habitat for endangered species is provided on many national wildlife refuges, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife management areas.

A complete description of the critical habitat designation was published in the Federal Register today. Copies of the rule and maps are available by contacting Timothy Merritt, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 446 Neal Street, Cookeville, Tennessee 38501; phone 931-528-6481, ext. 211, or on the Internet at <http://cookeville.fws.gov>.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 63 Fish and Wildlife Management offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies. Visit the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov>.

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